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NP View: David Suzuki highlights the dangerous lawlessness of climate activists

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Body

Last week, while most of British Columbia was focused on repairing damage from the devastating floods, prominent environmentalist David Suzuki was travelling to Victoria to headline(<https://www.paov.ca/mediamenu/alternative-news/14445-funeral-for-the-future-saturday-november-20th-2021-dr-david-suzuki-and-extinction-rebellion-in-victoria1637278562>) an anti-pipeline protest put on by Extinction Rebellion. On its own, it was a callous and opportune display, as the flooding damaged numerous pipelines in B.C., causing the province to limit gasoline purchases, impose travel restrictions and look for alternate fuel sources, while leaving whole towns without heat.

Suzuki made it that much worse when he said that(<https://vancouver.sun.com/news/canada/pipelines-will-be-blown-up-says-david-suzuki-if-leaders-dont-act-on-climate-change/wcm/5c46590d-2bb7-4aab-83c7-166e9b337b00>), "There are going to be pipelines blown up if our leaders don't pay attention to what's going on." While he finally apologized on Thursday, the initial attempts by Suzuki and his eponymous foundation to make it clear that they don't condone the use of violence and to distance themselves from those who do, left much to be desired. Suzuki's apology might have been too late.

Asked by the National Post on Monday whether he supported the idea of bombing pipelines, Suzuki said, "Of course not." But he then went on to state that the government and police are "declaring war against those that are protesting," and mused that there are few options available to protesters other than violence. The David Suzuki Foundation(<https://twitter.com/DavidSuzukiFDN/status/1462888644918665216>) tweeted, "When David speaks publicly, he speaks on his own behalf." But it immediately gave a list of reasons why climate activists are justifiably enraged.

This is dangerous not because any credible observer thinks Suzuki supports eco-terrorism, but because there are some members of Extinction Rebellion and other anti-pipeline movements who do. Genuine eco-terrorists are thankfully rare, but contempt for the rule of law is distressingly common among green activists.

The day before the Extinction Rebellion protest, the RCMP arrested(<https://www.wltribune.com/news/all-arrested-at-coastal-gaslink-pipeline-blockade-released-under-conditions/>) 29 people who literally laid siege to a camp of workers constructing the Coastal GasLink Pipeline, cutting 500 people off(<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/coastal-gaslink-pipeline-blockades-2021-gidmten-wetsuweten-1.6250961>) from water and other essential supplies.

The RCMP accused the protesters(<https://bc-cb.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ViewPage.action?siteNodeId=2087&languageId=1&contentId=72141>) of "engaging in illegal activities in the area, such as falling trees, stealing or vandalizing heavy machinery and equipment, and causing major

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destruction to the forestry road." When it finally moved in to uphold a court order that has been in effect for nearly two years, police described it as a "rescue mission."

Even after being released from jail on Monday, one of the group's leaders continued to insist the court's "injunction has no jurisdiction on (Indigenous) territories," despite the fact that the rule of law applies throughout the land and the elected councils of all 20 First Nations(<https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/david-staples-winners-and-losers-of-david-suzuki-gate-and-the-coastal-gaslink-pipeline-battle>) along the pipeline route have signed agreements in support of the project.

This is a continuation of the nationwide protests, of which Extinction Rebellion played a part, that brought the country to a virtual standstill in early 2020.

Tasha Kheiriddin: David Suzuki's 'blown up' pipelines comment is a winking incitement to eco-terrorism(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/tasha-kheiriddin-david-suzukis-blown-up-pipelines-comment-is-a-winking-incitement-to-eco-terrorism>)

Ellis Ross: Leonardo DiCaprio is wrong - the Coastal GasLink Pipeline is good for Indigenous people(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/ellis-ross-leonardo-dicaprio-is-wrong-the-coastal-gaslink-pipeline-is-good-for-indigenous-people>)

Though it claims to only engage in "nonviolent civil disobedience," the use of extrajudicial measures to achieve "**climate justice**" is at the heart of Extinction Rebellion(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extinction_Rebellion), a loosely knit extremist environmental group established in the United Kingdom in 2018 that's known for engaging in illegal protests and disrupting major metropolitan centres on both sides of the Atlantic.

Though most of the group's activities are "nonviolent" in the strict sense of the term, it advocates ignoring the law to generate attention. Its members have blockaded bridges, intersections and highways throughout the country. Last year, some protesters were charged after they went to the home of B.C. Premier John Horgan, in the hopes of placing him under "citizen's arrest." Just last month, 18 activists were arrested(<https://www.coastreporter.net/bc-news/extinction-rebellion-protest-causing-traffic-at-yvr-airport-4550631>) for blocking a major intersection leading to Vancouver International Airport.

While Canadians have the right to engage in peaceful protest, Extinction Rebellion goes a step further by actively advocating for cities to be disrupted in order to impose financial costs on citizens and governments, and for protests that result in mass arrests.

These tactics led to the British think tank Policy Exchange saying(<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Extremism-Rebellion.pdf>) that, "Every effort should be made to avoid legitimizing the extremist ideology that sits behind this campaign, its law-breaking strategy and Extinction Rebellion's complete disregard for the rule of law."

When folks are led to believe it is morally justifiable to break some laws, or to hurt some individuals, it is not much of a stretch for them to think that using violence against infrastructure, or even people, is also justified. If this was the point Suzuki was trying to make, he was correct.

But talking about pipelines being "blown up" during a protest organized by illiberal activists known for disregarding the rule of law was sure to be taken by some as an incitement to violence. And indeed, the response(<https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/extinction-rebellion-defends-david-suzukis-pipeline-comments>) by Extinction Rebellion spokesperson Zain Haq included thinly veiled threats against pipelines, politicians and journalists.

"Not only will pipelines be blown up, but we can be certain that world leaders will be put on trial for treason or worse - be killed," said Haq. "Although Extinction Rebellion activists are non-violent, we cannot control the actions of those outside of this movement who may commit acts of violence. The same goes for the media. When the Canadian

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public realizes that the press has been misleading them about how the climate emergency is being addressed, you can be sure that some people will become violent."

He was basically channelling a Hollywood mob boss saying, "I wouldn't lay a finger on you, but I can't speak for my associates over here." That Suzuki would attach his name to a group like this shows just how far even mainstream environmentalists have swung.

The big issues are far from settled. Sign up for the NP Comment newsletter, NP Platformed(<http://npplatformed.nationalpost.com/p/1>). !@COPYRIGHT=© 2021 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

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